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ABSTRACT

Noting that introductory public speaking and performance studies classes are often met with great anxiety and trepidation, this paper describes and categorizes the necessary student and audience behaviors at three levels of involvement: 1) pre-performance, 2) post-performance, and 3) audience participation. Teachers can show students how to apply a six-stage approach (acknowledge, ascend, approach, assess, attend, and activate) to each of the three levels of involvement. The paper describes how to debrief students at the end of a performance round. When applied and engaged fully by students, the taxonomy presented in this paper contributes to a positive performance environment and helps to reduce anxiety while encouraging a fuller understanding of the variables that affect credibility and the role of the audience. (RS)

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CS 510 279

A Taxonomy of Pre/Post Performance Behaviors for Speakers and Audiences in the Basic Course

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Goals: To describe and categorize the necessary student focus at three levels of involvement: pre-performance, post-performance and audience participation. The approach also encourages a fuller understanding of variables affecting credibility and addresses basic issues that define the role of the audience.

Performance days in the beginning

Public Speaking and Performance Studies classes are often met with great anxiety and trepidation. Students are often faced with how to structure the time that precedes a performance and how to engage effective and respectful audience behaviors. Instructor often quibble with standardized phrases and directive employments such as "be prepared" and "listen." These suggestions often fall by the way side when students are overcome with anxiety; or displaced as apathy when students do not understand their necessary performative engagement as audience members. This taxonomy of pre-performance behaviors offers a helpful checklist for students and teachers to engage what Pelias (1992) calls the performative role of the audience and the evaluative role of the audience.

Though appropriate for both Public Speaking and Performance classes, I will use performance as an all encompassing descriptive of the engaged assignment.

Assignment

The instructor should clearly inform students of the six stage approach and give directions to apply them at three levels of involvements: pre-performance, post-performance, and audience participation. The steps are organized around six specific foci: to acknowledge, to ascend, to approach, to assess, to attend and to activate. The foci and stages are listed as six A's which is both directive of the student focus and suggestive of the quality of participation.

Pre-Performance Behaviors

1. **Acknowledge**: A clear speaking order should be established before class. This allows students to know when they are expected to present and relieves any negotiations in the moment. This stage requires that students clearly acknowledge their performance opportunity and accept the opportunity with confidence and assurance.

2. **Ascend**: The basic movements of standing and preparing to move is often encumbered by tight seating arrangements. Visual aids, costume pieces or props often block the student's exit. The student is encouraged to anticipate the need to stand confidently by

preparing a clear path for moving into the performance space without calling undue attention to self.

3. **Approach:** Directly linked with standing students should be encouraged to map out a specific path and method to approach the performance arena. In public speaking classes this may entail approaching the podium. In performance classes this may be the beginning of character work and the establishment of the performance, scene, context and the necessary focus.

4. **Assess**: Once in the performance space students are encouraged to take the time necessary to assess the situation-accommodating and transforming the space to their needs. This may include set-up time for visual aids, notes, furniture arrangements, and the creation of the performance space.

5. **Attend**: Students are encouraged to acknowledge that the audience is prepared to receive their offering. This may be accomplished with a directed glance or a prompting question like "Are we ready?"

6. **Activate:** The student begins the performance.

Post-Performance Behaviors: The techniques of this method are effectively used in reverse to encourage an easy transition from the "speaker/performer state" to the "audience state."

1. **Attend**: At the completion of the performance students are encouraged to establish closure by attending to the audience. A simple pause might suggest closure as well as a "thank you for listening" or a bow, if appropriate.

2. **Assess**: After the performance the student is encouraged to quickly clear the space in preparation for the next performer. This would entail the removal of any visual aids or props.

3. **Approach**: Students are reminded that their departure from the performance arena is sometimes as important as their initial approach. Their credibility is still being evaluated long after the presentation. It is here that students are discouraged from exhaling loudly and displaying extreme relief that the experience is over-or offering personal critiques of their performance.

4. **Ascend/Descend**: Students are encouraged to return to their seat with the same degree of confidence and self control that initiated the performance, regardless of their personal assessment of their performance.

5. **Acknowledge**: Students are encouraged to give attention to the following performance and engage their role as audience member with the same degree of intense involvement.

Audience Behavior: The method can be used to focus on the participation level of the audience in any performance.

1. **Acknowledge:** Students are encouraged to understand their responsibility as audience members. This responsibility includes an acknowledgment of the speaking occasion, purpose and intent. They should be willing to engage in a transactional and dialogic relationship with the speaker. "Their task in such cases is to respond with sensitivity to the subtle clues of the speaker's aesthetic utterances" (Pelias 1992, p. 107). This is ultimately their responsibility as participants in any communication event. Students should be encouraged to establish an empathic connection with the speaker, who is also their colleague and in most cases their friend.

2. **Approach/Assess**: These steps are combined to reinforce student's understanding of how and when credibility is established. Students are reminded that credibility is and audienced based perception of believability that considers a wide variety of variables including "competence and integrity" (Osborn & Osborn 1997, p. 16). They should be reminded that the actual performance is only a part of the contributing variables to credibility. This may be valuable in terms of studying credibility as a specified concept, as well as understanding the context and scene in which the performance is engaged.

3. **Attend:** Students are encouraged to project behaviors to the performer that suggest their willing desire to attend and engage the performance. Beebe & Beebe (1991) offer some helpful tips for audience members to adapt to speakers. This may include

preparing to listen: sitting up straight, feet firmly planted on the floor, directed eye contact, a notebook and pen available for notes and an open mind

(pp. 44- 59).

4. **Activate**: Students are encouraged to fully participate and engage the performance by critically analyzing information and organization, as well as allowing the aesthetic qualities of the performative moment to move and inform their understanding of the text and or subject matter.

Debriefing

At the end of a performance round students should be required to critique and comment on the presentation. This could occur either orally, in terms of class discussion, or a written engagement. Within their critique they should include a reference to all of the assigned performative criteria: content, structure, as well as the aesthetic qualities of delivery, style, and language. Students should be asked to complete a credibility assessment scale of 1-10. In this assessment they should comment on those variables that affected the specified credibility designation: preparation, confidence, control, character, and charisma. They may also be asked to designate at what level of speaker involvement was most influential in their assessment-namely pre-performance, performance or post-performance.

Appraisal

This approach attempts to give students a method of focusing their attention before, during and after a performance. It addresses the role of both the speaker/performer and the audience member. It is assumed that the speaker/performer will follow all of the necessary and appropriate techniques that suggest a cognitive and somatic involvement with the materials and the audience during performance. When applied and engaged fully by students, like a checklist of specified foci, this taxonomy contributes to a positive performance environment. It has been my experience that performers and audience members are focused on a common object of contemplation-the performance occasion. The taxonomy can create an environment of mutual respect and anticipation.

This taxonomy of behaviors coupled with the effective techniques that most teachers usually outline in performance courses, helps to reduce anxiety while encouraging a fuller understanding of the variables that effect credibility and the role of the audience during performance. Students have seemed grateful for this helpful model that gives them a way to focus their tensions outward. They often comment that their reflections on the assessment criteria used to evaluate the credibility of other speakers, is used as a form of self-critique in preparing their own presentations.

Students will always display signs of anxiety and trepidation when faced with oral presentations. Yet, by using this taxonomy during those moments before the performance, I have found that their focus can be directed outward. They are less focused

on their anxiety and more on the preparatory steps in listening. The taxonomy also engages students in a facilitative process that leads to the success of their own performance.

Readings

Osborn, M. & Osborn S. (1997). Public speaking. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

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